

OH, SORRY, I GOT DISTRACTED BY THE INTERNET:
TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION, RECEPTION AND REMEDIATION BY AND FOR
FANS OF *SCOTT PILGRIM*

by

Andrew Townsend

B.A. Honours, University of Guelph

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Andrew Townsend

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Ryerson University

Oh, Sorry. I Got Distracted By The Internet: textual transmission, reception and
remediation by and for fans of *Scott Pilgrim*

Abstract:

This paper explores the dialogue that exists between official franchise remediations of *Scott Pilgrim* and those created by fan communities. As there is a greater push towards transmedia properties from studios and content developers, there is just as strong of a reaction from remixers and creators of fan fiction. In focusing on the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise – which has been adapted from comics books, to a feature length-film, a video game, multiple soundtracks, and an animated short, and which attracts an audience of media savvy consumers – we will see how fan responses are affected by different mediations of stories and characters, and how remixed and reconfigured *Scott Pilgrim* creations on Youtube help to inform further productions of the franchise.

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Oh, Sorry. I Got Distracted By The Internet: textual transmission, reception and remediation by and for fans of *Scott Pilgrim*

Free Scott Pilgrim

On Sunday, April 24th, 2011 I posted an audio adaptation of the *Free Scott Pilgrim* comic. The podcast is still available as a free download at <http://jamjamradio.wordpress.com/free-scott-pilgrim/>. *Free Scott Pilgrim* is a short story released by Oni Press for Free Comic Book Day in 2006. Set between the third and fourth volumes of the series, Scott, Ramona, and Wallace are heading off to see an unnamed gay cowboy movie, only to be delayed by an inevitable battle against evil ninja magic. It was recorded with amateur actors, using sound effects found at The Free Sound Project and music from the film's soundtrack. In terms of production this was a fairly DIY project, but there's no way I could have done it myself. Everything from inspiration to execution was created in and with a community. As of this writing it's received over seventy page views, with an unknowable number of downloads. 'Scott Pilgrim' is still one of the site's most popularly searched terms, which means that almost a year since the final book and movie's release, there are still fans out there looking for new ways to engage with their favourite series.

But this radio play failed. Without a doubt it's the most popular and enduring podcast that I've created, but as an adaptation it seems to fall short. It's too one-dimensional. *Scott Pilgrim* is exciting because of how it combines multiple genres and media presentations. So while the radio play is a faithful, nearly word-for-word translation of *Free Scott Pilgrim* from page to speakers, what is lost is the visual flare and referencing that goes on. Maybe I'm just not a very good audio director, but there's a magic in the visual, combinatory fan productions that is not present in a strictly audio adaptation. Which is odd, because *Scott Pilgrim* starts with sound.

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1

Introducing

Actually, *Scott Pilgrim* starts with music.

In *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, after the cover and a brief scene of Ramona Flowers walking through the snow, we are introduced to the series' titular character under a torrent of sound and typography, with 'SCOTT PILGRIM' being spelled out of the noise coming from his bass guitar (see Figure 1).

But it's not actually noise: it's just a drawing of it. As a franchise, *Scott Pilgrim* has excelled at making audiences think they're experiencing something they're not. Like looking at sound become letters, creator Bryan Lee O'Malley has mesmerized fans with a story that reads like a comic book, acts like a video game, looks like a Hollywood film, sounds like all the hip bands, and feels like it's your life. It is a franchise that exists on so

many levels as to appeal to a wide variety of content consumers, as well as content producers, and it's actually the people that do both that this paper is most interested in.

The first volume of the series was published in August of 2004. Six months later *Youtube* launched. While the franchise wasn't born into a world that had already seen the advent of the social web, or Web 2.0 as it is popularly called, Bryan Lee O'Malley was already part of a community who created and shared comics online. *DeviantArt* and *LiveJournal* had already been around for a couple of years, and webcomics have been gaining readers and creators since the late-nineties. What makes *Scott Pilgrim* special as a remediated franchise, as opposed to *Star Wars* or *The X-Men*, is that it was created and introduced to an audience that has both the means and the desires to remix, remake, remediate, and generally play around with their favourite stories and characters. The purpose of this paper is to explore the dialogue between official and unofficial adaptations of *Scott Pilgrim*, and how each community's interpretations of unique media-specific storytelling translate through iterations. As a focus, I'll be examining how music and music culture are represented and repurposed throughout the franchise by utilizing media theory about audience, reference, remediation, remixing, and fan communities. In a modern, multi-modal franchise, this interplay between creators and audiences is not only inevitable, it's integral – as stories permeate every medium, it only seems fair for fan responses to adapt in kind.

No really, Scott Pilgrim

Scott Pilgrim: 23, slacker, plays bass in the band Sex Bob-omb. In order for Scott Pilgrim to continue to date Ramona Flowers he has to defeat her seven evil exes. Initially

told over six digest-sized graphic novels is Scott Pilgrim's quest to grow up, get the girl, have an awesome band, and kick some ass. *Scott Pilgrim* is, more generally, a coming-of-age slacker/romance/comedy set in a world that blurs the line between the reality of growing up and a hypermediated pop-culture fantasy life that consistently breaks the fourth wall. Be it Scott and Ramona's love story, video game references, comic book action sequences, or just the cynical comedy of the modern twenty-somethings, Bryan Lee O'Malley crafted a story that balances enough different elements to appeal to lots of people without feeling like it's try to appeal to lots of people.

Those six volumes have, officially, been adapted officially into a feature film, a retro-injected video game, multiple soundtracks, and plenty of ancillary merchandise – *Scott Pilgrim* is a modern, transmedia franchise. Judging from its gradual development from one format to another, it seems to be that *Scott Pilgrim* has grown into a transmedia property because of audience demand. The immensely profitable *Matrix Trilogy* presupposed audience desire and involvement across multiple platforms, and other modern franchises tend to launch nowadays with an associated app or gaming component because audience demand beyond the film is assumed. So while it wasn't introduced as a multi-modal experience, *Scott Pilgrim* has grown into a diverse media property, where one screen and one story just aren't enough for fans. However, what began as physical books had already moved onto screens as fans posted art, videos, reviews, and fan fictions online. When movie studios and game developers began to mediate *Scott Pilgrim* in official licensed capacities, they weren't competing with unofficial fan versions so much as adding to the creative community already playing with the story and characters.

The Fans

In 2010, on July 20th, premier Toronto comic shop The Beguiling hosted a block party for the midnight launch of the sixth and final volume in the series, *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour*. To compare, O'Malley has said in interviews that he had to beg the fifty or so people who showed up to the first book launch in 2004, when *Scott Pilgrim* was just another indie title (Medley). The Beguiling's party shut down a block of Markham St., drawing a crowd of over two thousand fans and readers to attend signings, soundtrack previews, costume contests, live music, and play some old-school video games. Judging from the crowd I saw that night, *Scott Pilgrim* attracts fans that are like the story's characters: generally in their late-teens and early-twenties, ranging from comic book nerds, video game geeks, music hipsters, and just readers in general. It's a pretty diverse community, and it makes sense why movie studios expected this to be a worthwhile property to invest in.

Scott Pilgrim fans are a generation who grew up as the social web did, tapping into the communal tools and power of forums and file-sharing. Just as *Scott Pilgrim* isn't a franchise that is just about action or video game references or being in a band, its readers don't adhere only to one type of fandom. In a blog post titled *Music Fandom vs. Narrative Fandom*, media scholar Nancy Baym discusses how "narratives have characters, plots, and holes to be filled by fan creativity," while "music doesn't," ("Music Fandom" Baym). Fans of narrative works exist in a discursive space that encourages interpretation and imagination around character motivations and plot event. Fan fiction is largely written about popular narrative characters, not musicians. Music fans, on the other hand, have cover songs and remixes if they want to play with the objects of their fandom,

but that requires more technical skill than writing a story. Therefore, music fan communities largely center around discussing tour dates or album news. Once that's dried up there's not much left to discuss.

But that's a very rigid method for looking at fandom. It exists in a pre-internet era, where a fan's access to a knowledge community was limited to the amount of time and money they could commit to it, i.e. if you have only ten dollars, do you buy records or comic books? If you only have an hour, do you watch *Star Trek* or do you write a zine? The generation that is growing up with *Scott Pilgrim* not only voraciously multi-tasks, but also has access online to movies, music, comics, and video games, both through legal and pirate channels. Because of its strong connection to music culture, fans of *Scott Pilgrim* blur that distinction between narrative and music fans. Thanks to the blending of comic books and popular music within *Scott Pilgrim*, fans are free to participate and recreate the characters in a number of ways without acting against their fan-type.

I would argue that one of the reasons that *Scott Pilgrim* has found such a broad fan base is because of how it allows for more casual processes of fan participation. Comic book fans, like avid gamers or record collectors, get a bad rap for being too exclusive, for discussions mired in history and minutia, and for making a spectacle of their fandom by wearing tights and capes to conventions. But *Scott Pilgrim* is full of easy avenues in for interested newcomers: it's only six books and the characters are all likably hip. They wear normal clothes, talk about normal things, and all the pop-culture references legitimize fan interests outside of the franchise. As a reader, you're encouraged to know more than just *Scott Pilgrim*. Online, fan participation ranges from fan art, fan fiction,

mash-up videos, song covers, mixtapes, and more. Popularly, narrative fans are viewed as true fanatics, where the object of their fandom is their life. *Scott Pilgrim* fans operate more like music fans, where it becomes relevant to many parts of their lives. “Listeners are not passive consumers,” say Hargreaves, Miell, and Macdonald, “but active partners in a cultural process who use music to fulfill different functions according to different social contexts and locations,” (Hargreaves 13). Fans of *Scott Pilgrim* use the texts in various ways to fulfill music, comic, video game, or other needs. Like listeners, *Scott Pilgrim* fans are not necessarily creating new transmedia franchises in response to *Scott Pilgrim*, but they are showing their appreciation for it in multiple ways and in many different communities online.

The Pesky Fans

Professor and copyright activist Lawrence Lessig says in his book *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* that “the twentieth century was the first time in history of human culture when popular culture had become professionalized, and when the people were taught to defer to the professional,” (Lessig 28). This quote also points to the fact that access to the resources required to make mass and popular media was limited to the professionals. Only major studios could afford the personnel, time, equipment, and distribution channels necessary to make big budget movies. Only official comic book publishers could have the skill and resources to make professional comics. In the twenty-first century, when most fans online already have the tools at their disposal to make professional quality media, there’s no longer this need to defer to the professional. At the same time, many professionals are remaking and remixing as they

grow up. Bryan Lee O'Malley has shared online the *Transformers* comics that he made when he was eight. Fan fiction is not a foreign concept to professionals, and they are aware that their professional works are contributing to fan productions...and vice versa.

Prodsusage, as Axel Bruns defines it, is “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement,” and the people who engage in such collaboration are Producers (Bruns). The old model of content creation was a straight line from producers to distributors to consumers. Prodsusage muddies up that line, where producers and consumers exist within a community, constantly building and feeding off each other's creations. So while official publishers and studios have been key factors in ensuring *Scott Pilgrim* is adapted across multiple media and feeding these communities, the impetus and the perpetuation to see this series come to life in new ways is because of the fans. It's their ability to take the franchise and reinvent it that keeps it relevant to readers.

REFERENCE

That's what she said.

Music critic Chris Weingarten, in discussing the Beastie Boys extended music video for “Make Some Noise,” says that things are successful on the Internet if they can master “a perfect maelstrom of nostalgia, parody, celebrity and winky meta-commentary,” (Weingarten). This points to a culture of meme as conversation in popular media, where speaking in references and quotes forges a stronger immediate connection with audiences than sincerity. The success of “Make Some Noise” for Weingarten is not that it’s a video made for the Internet, but a video made of the Internet. And *Scott Pilgrim* functions in a similar way. The franchise gets touted in the media as being something that appeals to gamers and comic nerds and music fans, etc... As I said before, it seems like it’s made for everyone and everything. But like “Make Some Noise,” O’Malley isn’t creating something to appeal to all of these audiences, he just happens to like lots of things. *Scott Pilgrim* does not strive for intertextuality, it comes from it.

John Fiske, in *Television Culture*, discusses the producerly text and the role that intertextuality has in creating communities around a franchise. A producerly text is one that foregrounds its own nature as a text, resists a singular reading, and relies on the audience to help find and create meaning in the text. Like a writerly text, a producerly one is open to interpretation, it rewards multiple readings, and places an emphasis on the role of the viewer. But a writerly text is highbrow, avant-garde, and appeals only to a minority of consumers. Producerly texts are popular, in part because a producerly text “relies on discursive competencies that the viewer already possesses, but requires that they are used in a self-interested, productive way,” (Fiske 95). *Scott Pilgrim* follows this

model, in that the main plot is subordinated by popular attention to the myriad references and jokes throughout the story. The charm of the tale doesn't come just from the single adventure/romance storyline, but in Scott explaining to Ramona what the X-Men were up to in the 80's, or in Stephen Stills teaching readers to make vegan shepherds pie. Recipes and references, video game terminology for life milestones – readers know how to understand this type of language, this allusion as conversation, and can select the important meanings therein.

“Because sequence and flow are organized according to associative rather than logical relations, the connections are not made explicitly in the text, but are devolved to the viewer where their associative nature will allow them to be made subconsciously,”

(Fiske 101)

These subconscious connections allow fans that are knowledgeable on a certain fan topic or community identify with certain facets of the story while also not feeling like they're missing out on other aspects. Or more accurately, as Fiske says:

The theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it. These relationships do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually.

(Fiske 108)

To go back to a previous example, readers don't need to know about the Claremont/Silvestri era of the X-Men to know that Scott's blathering on about something Ramona doesn't care about. Fans who don't know comic book history can still compare this scene in *Scott Pilgrim vs The Universe* to any other story where boredom in hurting a relationship, like anytime Ross talks about dinosaurs to Rachel on *Friends*.

Dirty Pair

It makes sense, then, that Edgar Wright was approached to direct the live-action adaptation of the franchise. Wright's previous works include the BBC series *Spaced*, and the cult hits *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*. All of these titles are steeped in generic and pop-culture references, focusing on general nerd culture, zombies, and cop films.

Wright's work is self-aware, without falling too far into parody. In that same way that zombies can be beaten in time with Queen songs, or Nick Frost's love for *Point Break* can be both genuine and hilarious, Wright's adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim* dishes out constant references to *Wayne's World 2* (the desert that Scott goes to in his mind) or the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Arcade Game* (when Gideon flashes as he is near defeat). Wright doesn't try to hide the fact that his movies are inspired and informed by other productions, or even that his movies are movies. When Julie's curse words are bleeped and censored, Scott is aware of the black box that covers her mouth. Similarly, many of Scott and Ramona's conversations in the book involve directing one another to read flashbacks in previous volumes, rather than spend time recapping events that have happened. *Scott Pilgrim* is read alongside other texts, but it is also read alongside the conventions of its mediations. The very techniques of how the story is being brought to life is being commented on, making audiences aware of its constructed nature, and begging for it to be recreated.

A text that is made to stand on its own, that presents itself as a flawless media product denies fan participation lest they mess up its unity and perfection. And while O'Malley and Wright's versions of *Scott Pilgrim* demonstrate a high level of technical skill, they don't take themselves so seriously that they are above connecting to other

works. The movie and books are not only the next step in their progress as artists, but they are also a contribution to the lineage that has inspired them. This intertextual, self-referential allowance can be seen culminating in the Youtube video *Shaun of the Dead – Done in 60 Seconds (a la Brian Lee O’Malley)* by Pippinopalon, where Wright’s *Shaun of the Dead* is retold and reimagined in O’Malley’s art style, with censored swears and combo counters to boot. Fans are creating a new form of intertextuality, where texts are not only read alongside other texts, but alongside themselves, referencing the creator and the creations as a whole.

NEStalgia

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World starts, the way that most big budget films do, with the opening credits for the studios that produced the movie. In keeping with the retro-gaming nostalgia, the Universal logo has been pixilated to appear as it would on a Super Nintendo, with the usual fanfare remixed to match. The audio blips along, with 8-bit soundcards replacing an orchestra. This is Chiptune.

Originally made by musicians hacking into old gaming systems, there are now plenty of programs, available for free to download, which work with GarageBand or other such music software, allowing users to play with classic gaming sounds. *Scott Pilgrim* revels in this. The feature film score is full of 8-bit instruments and chiptune remixes, adding to the video game sound effects that punctuate the film. Developers of *Scott Pilgrim vs The World: The Game* hired popular chiptune artists Anamanaguchi to write the score to complete the game’s retro-sensibilities. All of these creators, and many of *Scott Pilgrim*’s fans, grew up on old video games and 8-bit sounds, but have also been

avid consumers of the proceeding tools and technical innovations. Ubisoft makes *Assassin's Creed*, a game series known for its realistic graphics as well as a lush soundtrack. Planned or not, they bring these very modern sensibilities to a throwback style of gaming. "There is something beautiful about learning how to use the so-called constraints of old technology to expand creativity," says Anders Carlsson about the chiptune community (Carlsson 162). With most technologies, upgrades mean that the old tools get cast aside before they can be fully realized. Sure there are many fun and exciting things to do with 8-bit soundcards, but are they only being explored because of nostalgia? "What will happen to chip music when kids are no longer raised with bleepy video game?" wonders Carlsson, "It leads to the question of whether the digitally primitive interfaces and sounds have something unique to offer, or if it is just a nostalgic fad," (Carlsson 162).

In *Scott Pilgrim*, digitally primitive sounds are used to underscore the video game aspects of the franchise. The sounds remind us of the joy that comes from playing video games, especially as a kid. Scott achieving coins upon defeating enemies or the infamous status/pee bar are narrative and visual markers in the books to signify game play. The movie recreates *Street Fighter*-like fight scenes with an announcer and a combo counter. This morphs the references into a form of media nostalgia that fill readers and viewers with a want for something they never really had: perspective on their youth.

Without writing songs explicitly about *The Legend of Zelda*, chiptune is the best way for the music of *Scott Pilgrim* to reference the past. Andreas Bohn says:

Media nostalgia in the media is a manifestation of self-reference in the media because the media refer to themselves, show how they have been the source of entertainment, how they have been subject to historical

changes or even destruction, and how they have been remembered or consigned to oblivion.

(Bohn 152)

Music in the *Scott Pilgrim* franchise recognizes the past that it comes from, allows room for an update of sorts, and then still pushes forward. While *Scott Pilgrim* is a very modern, potentially futuristic, franchise, it partially does so by building and referencing the past. This allows fans to more strongly attach themselves to *Scott Pilgrim* because they don't need to abandon what they love in order to engage with a new fan community. There's room for nostalgia in *Scott Pilgrim*, as long as you build something new on top of it. The past is great because you don't have to live in it, but that doesn't mean you can't still love it.

REMIX

“Right now, into this instant, must flow the all.”

“If people were passing out paints on the street for free every day,” supposes Greg Gillis, aka Girl Talk, in the film *Good Copy, Bad Copy*, “I’m sure there’d be a lot more painters,” (Johnsen). His argument here is that consumers are inundated every day with media, a constant barrage of images and sounds, stories and songs, and it only makes sense that fans want to make something out of this. Remixing is a way for producers to contextualize and make sense of the media they engage with every day.

In a similar documentary, *RiP: A Remix Manifesto*, Brett Gaylor lays out the four points that make up his Remixer’s Manifesto: 1) Culture always builds on the past, 2) The past always tries to control the future, 3) Our future is becoming less free, and 4) To build free societies you must limit control of the past (Gaylor). To discuss new forms of creativity, the first point is the most pertinent as the last three deal largely with legislation and copyright law.

So culture always builds on the past: O’Malley is a graphic novelist informed by and updating manga storytelling for North American audiences. He is integrating video games and pop culture that he grew up on into a language that is not tied to the medium – re: power-ups as a metaphor for life lessons. Online, fans are using this language and constantly building on the immediate past, moving popular culture forward at an increasingly rapid rate. For example, Edmonton MC Cadence Weapon released the *Tron: Legacy Mixtape* in November of 2010. The song “The Suburbs” samples from The Arcade Fire song of the same name, which had only been officially released three months earlier. Is that enough time to understand the past, to remake it and build something new

for the future? The first trailer for *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* came out in March 2010. In the months before the film's release in August, hundreds of remix videos began popping up on Youtube mashing up the limited audio and video from the trailer with *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, competing summer blockbuster *Inception* and more. Fans were recontextualizing the movie before it had even come out. It's as if they had preemptively decided what the film was going to mean to the audience and the franchise; essentially, the trailer showed fans exactly the *Scott Pilgrim* that they wanted to see on screen, enough so that they could start combining it with other media to which they related.

The “Official” Remix Channel

A month before the film came out, Universal set up an official *Scott Pilgrim* remix channel on Youtube. The studio had gotten people to remix the film both as a way to deliver some extra sneak-peeks into how the characters looked and acted, but also to situate *Scott Pilgrim* fully and properly within the digital remix space. They even made their own ‘What?’ supercut, which not only preempts a fan generation of such a supercut, but also lets remixers know that *Scott Pilgrim* is meme-worthy...and probably gave the movie some extra nerd-appeal, enticing a bigger audience to see it opening day. Lessig comments on this when he says that these markets, the communities of remixed and ‘original’ content that vie for our attentions, “are complementary, not competitive,” (Lessig 56). In the context of the official remix channel, the remixes and the original creative piece are working together to excite and inspire fans not just to see the movie, but also to think about it can be remixed again and again – Because that’s how a

franchise stays alive. Going back to the cyclical nature of produsage, Lessig similarly notes this when he identifies the Read/Write Internet as an ecosystem (Lessig 63). The Read/Write Internet is a space where users and audiences can absorb culture, but also play and create with it. Culture used to be Read Only (like the old line of production mentioned earlier), but now the RW Internet needs audiences to add to it. As Lessig says, RW culture:

It gives the audience something more. Or better, it asks something more of the audience. It is offered as a draft. It invites a response. In a culture in which it is common, its citizens develop a kind of knowledge that empowers as much as it informs or entertains.

(Lessig 85)

This idea of a collaborative media, one that cannot fully exist without the help of the community, is not specific to remixes. That is to say, a remix isn't the only medium that begs audience interaction. If culture is always building upon the past, nothing is created in a vacuum, and every text bears the marking of what came before it. This is especially true with genre storytelling.

Fiske, again discussing intertextuality, says that genres are full of “conventions and structural elements...that are shared between producers and audiences,” in order to provide order to multiple texts and meanings (Fiske 109-110). Creators and consumers get pleasure in playing around in these structures, pushing the boundaries of the genre, similar to how chiptune artists feel empowered by the constraints. And as genre stories are confined by codes, they are indebted to the texts that came before that defined the codes. This is not to suggest that every genre story is a remix. Instead, every story inherently has a history and a backstory that it is building upon. “You pay respect to tradition by incorporating it. But you make the tradition compelling by doing so in a way

that makes everyone want to understand more,” (Lessig 96). What *Scott Pilgrim* represents is a franchise where genre storytelling and remix have combined. The phenomenon is not unique to *Scott Pilgrim*, but it illustrates the point ever so nicely. The fan community is not just a consumptive group, but also a productive one. They are producers.

...quite operational when your friends arrive.

That all texts are open for audience participation and for remixing does not devalue the main source text, but it does reframe how fans approach works and titles. Bruns explores how produsage turns creative works into artefacts, unfinished texts that contribute to the entire community’s progress towards great pieces of art. “What is significant about creative produsage,” says Bruns, “is that it embraces the equipotentiality of each participant to become an artist in their own right,” (Bruns 230-231). Like the idea of a thousand monkeys at a thousand typewriters eventually turning out Shakespeare, an entire community constantly creating and recreating equally has the potential for turning out something astounding...or they’ll merely creating a vast collection of unwatchable videos, but the potential and the possibility are there. The idea that everything is up for grabs to be manipulated and improved upon challenges the old production model of consumers getting a complete product. As Bruns explains:

Artistry and creative work, and the idea of the creative work, are substantially affected by community-based produsage efforts, as these undermine the idea of the work itself as a complete, finished, and defined entity just as they undermine the idea of the industrial product as a complete, finished, and defined package.

(Bruns 231)

This ties into Lessig's view that RW culture is a draft that invites response. Producers disrupt the completeness of a creative work by reminding the community that it can always be modified. The *Official Scott Pilgrim Remixes* channel reminds fans that the film is an imperfect adaptation, full of dropped plotlines and references. Universal Studios is encouraging audiences to watch and re-watch the film (and subsequently buying tickets to screenings, or purchasing the DVD) so that they can remix and remake in order to create the best possible *Scott Pilgrim*, because even the original books aren't the best representation of what fans love from the franchise. Fan creations are all trying to achieve a measure of *Scott Pilgrim*-ness, and none can achieve that as long as they remain incomplete.

Punk Capitalism?

Matt Mason, in his book *The Pirate's Dilemma*, charts how cultures grow and develop, how they go from being a subculture to mainstream. Likening it to a virus, he says that you have to 1) Let the audience make the rules, 2) Avoid the limelight; talk only to your audience, 3) Feed the virus according to its size, and 4) Let it die (Mason 219-220). By creating official remixes, the franchise's producers are opening up the doors for fan remixes, removing the threat of legal action against those who wish to play with *Scott Pilgrim*. Fans already were remixing anyways, so this was a gesture of approval. And when the virus is the hundreds of thousands of people online who have read or watched the film, then there is almost no limit to what you can feed it. Fans always want more of their favourite texts, and want to be reminded of it constantly. The official *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* Facebook group still updates daily with links to new video remixes, product

news, or screening information – fans can't get enough. Then how does it die? Almost a year after the film and final book came out, when do people stop maintaining the Facebook groups or the Twitter feeds? As long as fans keep recreating, then the system can feed itself.

Bruns identifies similar means for produsage communities, where systems need to feed and harbor creativity with content and tools. But while Mason points to a future where businesses can effectively capitalize on remix subcultures, Bruns warns against harnessing, harvesting, and hijacking produsage communities (Bruns 31-33). Lessig's point is that the Internet is democratizing creativity, and franchises like *Scott Pilgrim* legitimize the value of the produsage community. But if corporations start seeing the power of these communities as something they'd like to tap into for profit and marketing, then it is a false freedom being given to producers – and it's producers who should have the most freedom to share their love of a franchise.

FAN FICTION

Let them write fan fiction!

In the essay *In Praise of Fan Fiction*, author and blogger Cory Doctorow extols the benefits and virtues of encouraging a fan produsage community to flourish. Creators of fan fiction are so invested in a property that their own creative practice is done in the language and codes of their fandom. They will work to convert their friends and family, building a community and network of other fans. And most importantly for professional creators, fan fiction writers will stick with a franchise long after any hype or spike in popularity. To deny them the opportunity to recreate with a text denies a unique opportunity to make the text matter to them. The point is not for it to be amazing. As Doctorow says:

Much fanfic — the stuff written for personal consumption or for a small social group — isn't bad art. It's just *not* art. It's not written to make a contribution to the aesthetic development of humanity. It's created to satisfy the deeply human need to play with the stories that constitute our world. There's nothing trivial about telling stories with your friends — even if the stories themselves are trivial. The act of telling stories to one another is practically sacred — and it's unquestionably profound.

(Doctorow 91-92)

Producers, then, are not in it to make transcendent works. Any measure of personal gain for a producer comes from showcasing their skills in editing or writing, but they are not creating a distinct work that can stand alone; any producer is creating against and within the original work, and therefore their ideas are always directly subsumed by the inspiration. Producers are out to make drafts and artefacts, incomplete works that ask for more of the community and of the creator. Lessig says that “remixed media succeed when they show others something new; they fail when they are trite or derivative,” (Lessig 69). Doctorow, on the other hand, would say that “the copy can be art, or it can

be crap — the best way to find out which kind you’ve got inside you is to try,” (Doctorow 89). It shouldn’t necessarily be about creating groundbreaking art – it should be just about creating.

How am I not myself?

In his seminal book *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins talks about this close relationship that fans have with their favourite texts:

For the distanced observer, the text remains something out there, untouched and often untouchable, whose materials are not available for appropriation precisely because they can never fully become one’s own property. Proximity seems a necessary precondition for the reworkings and reappropriations... The text is drawn close not so that the fan can be possessed by it but rather so that the fan may more fully possess it. Only by integrating media content back into their everyday lives, only by close engagement with its meanings and materials, can fans fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource.

(“Textual Poachers” Jenkins 62)

Like Doctorow points out, fans use texts to therapeutically work through their creative urges (Doctorow 90). These active resources are a way for fans to contextualize not only meaning in the source texts and its intertexts, but also in other facets of their own lives. It’s not hard to see how Scott Pilgrim’s quest for getting his life together can be informative or even inspirational to other slackers in their early-twenties. His journey can be their journey as well, but only if readers can bring him into their daily lives.

In his discussion about the produsage community surrounding *Doctor Who*, Christopher Marlow notes that it is almost impossible to quantify the scope of a text. For example, would *Scott Pilgrim* begin with the first page of the book and end with the last? Where would the movie fit in? And what role to DVD extras, new posters created by O’Malley, or secondary texts like this research paper play in furthering expanding the

Scott Pilgrim universe? Taking into account all the influences on the books and the creative impact that O'Malley's had on other artists, the scope of *Scott Pilgrim* seems to be constantly expanding, and every time a new fan creation is posted online what it means to be *Scott Pilgrim* grows just a little more. It also must be considered that no transmedia property is naturally linear, as fans get introduced to the characters and story through a variety of portals. No *Scott Pilgrim* fan is required to read the books first, or to ignore the odd .gif shared on Tumblr. How they first find their way into *Scott Pilgrim* affects their relationship to the text. The first reading is unpredictable. It is because of this expansive and uncontrollable nature of a text that Marlow says "attention must be paid to the way in which the text quotes, displaces or folds itself," (Marlow 48).

A folding text is one that does not restrain itself to boundaries. For remix and fan communities, all text fold as all fan creation begin to be read alongside the original, and vice versa. What matters, though, is that a text is not afraid to incorporate these other creations into its canon. Volumes 3, 4, and 5 include pinups and mini-comics set in the *Scott Pilgrim* universe, but drawn by other creators. By publishing these with the original books instead of posting them online or in a separate pamphlet, Oni Press and O'Malley are acknowledging that a) there is a world to *Scott Pilgrim* beyond those drawn and written by O'Malley, and that b) fan creations can be just as valid to readers. Comics have a long history of this: legacy characters from publishers like Marvel or DC who have been published for more than 50 years – i.e. Spider-Man, Batman, etc... – are regularly reimagined by new writers and artists, without losing any authenticity in the character's chronology. Stan Lee's *Spider-Man* is just as valid to fans as that written by Brian Michael Bendis or Peter David. Steve Ditko's visual representation of *Spider-Man*

is just as real to readers as Mark Bagley or Todd McFarlane's. The stories that appear in *Scott Pilgrim* are neither official or unofficial stories, their place in the *Scott Pilgrim* universe being ambiguous. This makes them both authorized extensions of the story, as well as fan fiction legitimized by the publisher.

On the surface, some fans remix and remake because there is pleasure to be derived from "putting words into character's mouths," or in, "making the series represent subtexts it normally represses," ("Textual Poachers" Jenkins 228). It's fun, as a fan, to be in control of these characters and worlds that are more often than not outside of your influence. But on a deeper level it's fun to repurpose stories and personalize these texts that are so familiar. If as a fan you spend so much of your free time identifying and engaging with a text, then it can only be satisfying to further immerse yourself in that world as a creator.

SP Yourself

As another pre-release promotion for the movie, the *Scott Pilgrim Avatar Creator* launched online. By selecting and combining different attributes, such as skin tone or outfits, people could generate a caricature of themselves as a *Scott Pilgrim* character. Once created, the characters could then be shared on Twitter, Facebook, StumbleUpon, Reddit, and more. For a time, these were people's profile pictures on a number of social media platforms. Features like this bring a text and fans closer together; it's as close a fan can get without O'Malley drawing them into the story, or Wright having them walk on screen. This is another level of casual fandom that *Scott Pilgrim* audiences can participate in, without venturing into socially contentious behaviour. To be a fan of *Scott Pilgrim*

means that you can do things you would normally be doing anyways (having a display picture, wearing t-shirts, listening to music) but now you can do it all with some *Scott Pilgrim* flare.

Remodeling the 4th Wall

A part of why *Scott Pilgrim* garners such a youth-based audience is because the creators are young themselves. O'Malley and Wright speak the same reference-laced language as their readers, and so their works are fast, and full of allusions that young people will get. Audiences engage with these works because they see something of themselves in the texts, but they also see an ideal version of themselves. Readers wish they were as funny, or hip, or skilled as the characters in *Scott Pilgrim*, and for a while fans can pretend they are. Janice Radway, in *Reading the Romance*, found that the Smithton readers that she interviewed used reading to “escape figuratively into a fairy tale where a heroine’s similar needs are adequately met,” (Radway 93). *Scott Pilgrim* readers, a stereotyped generation of media saturated and directionless youth, can get the satisfaction of finding love and a job even if the fans themselves are having a hard time doing that in their own lives. More importantly, perhaps, is how Radway identifies reading as a “free space,” where readers are “liberated” from the tasks that populate the real world. The world of *Scott Pilgrim* is as familiar to fans as the real world is, but it is unburdened by the weight of responsibilities. While this point is true for all fiction, that it offers a measure of escape, the way that texts are now endlessly engaged with, recreated, and brought closer into the lives of the fan, this free space of reading is now a free space of creating as well. And when a reader so identifies with a text because it shares their

language, the illusion is that readers are essentially playing with their own world. “The fact that the story is fantastic,” says Radway, “does not compromise the accuracy of the portrayal of the physical environment within which the idealized characters move,” (Radway 109). Yes, the stories are improbable, but readers suspend their disbelief, assuming that the world that serves as a backdrop to *Scott Pilgrim* “is exactly congruent with their own,” (ibid.). The more that characters are developed or that new facets of the world are explored, the more the author suggests that this place is real and relatable to the readers’ lives.

Location, etc...

Scott Pilgrim is noted for being set in Toronto. Sneaky Dee’s, Honest Ed’s, Lee’s Palace, and other Toronto establishments are prominently identified in the books. When it came time to make the movie, it was important to Edgar Wright to keep it set in Toronto in order to further the type of magical realism that the story brings to the city. “There’s a spirit in the books that I tried to bring across in the film of making Toronto seem like a fairy-tale land,” said Wright in an interview with The AV Club (Phipps). It’s very special when a story can be grounded to a location, and fans can go experience those locations and make all kinds of associations. Online, there is a developing community for *Scott Pilgrim* tour of Toronto. The City of Toronto and Universal Pictures launched a *Toronto Loves Scott Pilgrim* site to boost tourism to the city. Other fans have started Flickr albums of their “Pilgrimages,” comparing drawings from the book to the actual locations. Some fans even left a skateboard chained to the steps up to Casa Loma, commemorating the spot where Lucas Lee exploded into coins after being defeated by Scott (See Figure

2). These tours, plus the aforementioned avatar creator, set up a flow between reality and fiction, where readers and characters can share the same space; “This technique again continues the illusion that the [fantasy] world is as real as the readers’ world and that the characters’ lives continue just as theirs do,” (Radway 109).



Figure 2

Resistance is futile.

Fandom for *Scott Pilgrim*, thanks to the Internet, isn't an internal process. While it's possible for a person to privately enjoy the books and movies, it's more likely that they also consume and share links to videos, podcasts, fan art, and more. In his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* Henry Jenkins says that “to create is much more fun and meaningful if you can share what you can create with others,” (“Convergence” Jenkins 136). The web provides a simple and quick infrastructure for sharing creations online, which allows this new brand of folk culture to flourish. The easier fan productions are to make and share, the more people there are that will be willing to create. Making remixes and mashups is has fewer barriers than ever before, the same with posting content online or reblogging links. Youtube has so many

Scott Pilgrim videos partly because it's so easy to make, share, and find *Scott Pilgrim* videos – why not make your own? Jenkins says:

Fan digital film is to cinema what the punk DIY culture was to music. There, grassroots experimentation generated new sounds, new artists, new techniques, and new relations to consumers which have been pulled more and more into mainstream practice.

(“Convergence” Jenkins 132)

In the past six years, online videos have gone from being a minority practice to a multi-million dollar meme industry. According to Youtube, 35 hours of video are being uploaded every minute, not to mention what's going up on Vimeo or other video sharing sites. The power is in every person's hands to make and share their creative work. “Most of what the amateurs create is gosh-awful bad,” says Jenkins, “yet a thriving culture needs spaces where people can do bad art, get feedback, and get better,” (“Convergence” Jenkins 136). The key here is that this space is now more public than just a small writer's circle.

REMEDICATION

Not Better. Different.

Lev Manovich, in *The Language of New Media*, sees an overlooked tension here between what was once a private reader interaction with a text and this trend of engaging creators in productive moments. Interactive media, he notes, is usually equated to computer technologies and usually in reference to when there comes some type of noticeable, physical interaction. For example, if the audience has to make a choice to select a menu item or push a button there is a link or a command that must be engaged. But for Manovich, “the psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis forming, recall and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all,” are mistakenly identified as being linked to an objectively interactive moment (Manovich 71-72).

What Manovich is talking about here is not simply that subtler forms of interactivity are being ignored in favour of observable participation, but that there is a deeper shift in how people read a text when it is remediated: “While it is relatively easy to specify different interactive structures used in new media objects, it is much more difficult to theoretically deal with user experiences of these structures,” (Manovich 71). In interactive media, an observer can tell how the audience reacts based on the choices they make within that interactive moment. But even in media that is not immediately interactive, as it is in a video game, the audience is still making choices that cannot be so easily seen. These are choices of reception, of how the audience internalizes the information being shared. While Manovich is specifically speaking about ‘new media’ in 2001, I think that ten years later we can stretch that to include new mediations of a work.

Different. Not Better.

If different media structures affect how an audience receives a work, then we can expect that the *Scott Pilgrim* books are understood by an audience in a different way than the movie is. What makes Wright's adaptation to the spirit of the books so interesting is that he tries to adapt the storytelling language of comics to film.

Remediation is the refashioning of media codes and conventions that both bring into context the constructed nature of a mediated work, as well as provide new meaning and authenticity to its presentation (Bolter 44). Translating *Scott Pilgrim* from a comic to a movie requires a deconstruction and then reconstruction of the text in an effort to find new ways of balancing the immediacy and hypermediacy of the work, as well as refashioning presentation and representation to fit the text into a new medium.

Immediacy is the process in which a work is made more transparent, that erases the mark of the author, and approaches something of a real, unfabricated experience (Bolter 21).

Hypermediacy is the opposite, where a text works to draw attention to its constructed nature and playing with the potential of new and combinatory technologies (Bolter 31). It is much easier for a work to be transparent if it remains on its own, just a comic book or just film, where the story can immerse audiences with their own style and conventions.

While all works are inherently hypermediated because they are media constructions, *Scott Pilgrim's* combinatory nature challenges the iconographic nature of comics.

Icons & Abstracts

From a reader's perspective, Scott McCloud points to the icon as a unique attribute to the medium of comics in how these stories relate to the audience:

When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential "meaning," an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.

(McCloud 30)

Not quite as open as pure text, but also not as limited to interpretation as film, cartooning in comics represents an economy of meaning to focus on the core message of a character or scene. When it comes to individual characters, "the more cartoony a face is...the more people it could be said to describe," (McCloud 31). Scott Pilgrim with his big eyes, fluid gestures, and shaggy hair seems to embody the nerdy everyman. Readers can relate to this vague physicality, thereby getting themselves more immersed in the *Scott Pilgrim* world and style. And again, when these characters dress the same as the readers, it's not such an exhibitionistic task to dress up in *Scott Pilgrim* costumes for conventions or block parties. There is immediacy to the icon that draws readers closer to the text by increasing their ability to relate to it.

Film, on the other hand, doesn't offer this type of abstraction. James Monaco says that, "film does not suggest...it states," (Monaco 159). Film is very definite. The image that appears on screen is the image that appears on screen, where a rose isn't just any old rose – it's that specific rose that the director chose to show. As an audience, Monaco explains, there is space in literature (and in the iconographic potentials of cartooning) for the reader to imagine what the fabricated world looks like. In film, however, one can't imagine (Monaco 45). Wright was smart in casting Michael Cera to play Scott Pilgrim, for he's an actor who has built his career on playing the nerdy everyman. Cera would not disrupt fan identification with the text, and likewise with the rest of the film's cast. But

do the actors in the film look like the comic book characters, or are the comic book characters iconic enough to be applied to anyone approximating their hair and clothing?

It is in fan productions then that we can see immediacy being disrupted. In *scott pilgrim vs. the world spoof*, MrHomemadefilms1 acts out a version of the movie with himself playing all parts. Not only is the disruption noticeable when he is acting against his gender as Ramona or Knives, but as a young black man he doesn't convey the Scott Pilgrim shown on page or on screen. While it would be nice for Scott to stand in for the nerdy (literally) everyman, fan productions like this disrupt the unity of the world around him. If it is noteworthy for Scott and his friends that Knives Chau is Chinese, then it would be notable to mention Scott being anything other than Caucasian.

The inverse of this argument is well demonstrated by the *Free Scott Pilgrim* radio play, as there are so few points for fan identification and relation. A voice does not paint so full a picture as to tell a story without the audience's imagination, but a voice is also not abstract enough to audience identification. For *Scott Pilgrim*, remediation and fan identification largely relies on visual play.

The issue of interactivity and remediation comes up again in the official adaptations when looking at how Wright deals with the gutters of the comics. The gutters are the spaces in between panels, where non-essential actions are assumed to take place. These actions can range from passing time, to a change in scenery, or even just the movement of a hand. Gutters break up the action by implying that something has changed. Where, as McCloud demonstrates, an entire party scene can play out across a single panel, gutters create moments for the reader to infer possibilities of time or an interpretation of the connection between the two actions. Gutters are an act of

collaboration between the audience and the text where both are seeking closure, which McCloud defines as the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole,” (McCloud 63).

Cut & Paste

Bolter and Grusin, in *Remediation*, talk about collage and photomontage in the same way. By placing images together in a setting, “the artist is defining a space through the disposition and interplay of form that have been detached from their original context and then recombined,” (Bolter 39). The proximity of images near one another requires the audience to read into the picture and develop meaning from their juxtaposition. The effect is similar in comics, but the unity of the page or of the story allows for greater immediacy. The gutter does not critically break the reading, merely provides an opportunity for the reader to define the pacing.

Again, in contrast, Monaco says that film is more limited because it operates in real time (Monaco 45). How a viewer follows the narrative of a movie from point A to point B is decided by the director, with little agency given to audiences for manipulation beyond speeding up, pausing, or rewinding the film – New technologies offer new methods to interact with the story (i.e. DVR capabilities, or all of the features offered in a DVD) but they do not change how readers move through the narrative. To be properly understood by the audience, *Scott Pilgrim* is still a linear narrative. But, in a true bit of remediation, Wright employs the wipe effect that he is notorious for, a “nostalgic effect,” claims Monaco, where the transition “looks like the page of a book turning,” (Monaco 224). With fast wipes and scene transitions, Wright is able to maintain a the brief

conversation on a date between Scott and Knives that goes from the Goodwill Store, to Pizza Pizza, to Sonic Boom, to Scott's home on Alberta Ave. The issue here, though, is that Wright decides how fast the date goes. While such a scene takes a leisurely seven-pages in the books, it passes by in the movie in under three minutes. The speed of these wipes in trying to keep up with the unity of the book page can be disconcerting.

The closest that film can get to collage while still maintaining a narrative cohesion is through splitscreens and montage. The montage is understood by creators and audiences as an effect which often both conveys "a great deal of information in a short time," while also engaging in a dialectical process, creating a "third meaning" out of the adjacent shots (Monaco 216). The transitions between shots are like gutters, where the audience is required to make closure on the passing moments or omitted information. "The laws of Hollywood grammar insist that the excess dead time be smoothed over," says Monaco, and that just "snipping out the unwanted footage," is jarring and not permitted (218). Audiences can assume that what the filmmakers choose to remove is extraneous time, and Wright's creation of a montage-date is still unified by the conversation between Scott and Knives. But there is a tension between the fact that such a short conversation cannot conceivably be conducted over the entire time it would take to travel to all of the locations, so we must take the assumption that more events happened and understand that conversation is only emblematic of the characters' relationship.

On the other hand, the scene after Scott breaks up with Knives uses splitscreen to show Scott's thought cycling from the bus he is on to Knives' pained face, the bus, Knives, the bus, and then Ramona. Such a technique plays the role of the narrator, yet

manages to be explicit without being expository. O'Malley poached this splitscreen technique from cinema, which then in turn repurposed it from the comics.

Bonus Material

This type of storytelling, both in comics and movies, challenges how fans see the unity of the work. Such piecework in presenting a narrative encourages audiences to make leaps between actions and scenes and characters. It is no wonder, then, that remediations of the franchise continue this technique of hopping from scene to scene. This is evident in the Cartoon Networks *Scott Pilgrim vs The Animation*, made for their Adult Swim block. This chronicles the flashbacks of Scott and Kim's adolescent years somewhere in Northern Ontario. As the animated clips close with a reminder to go see the film in theaters, this short is of course just another promotion for the movie. However, what's interesting is that it feels entirely like the trailer. In under four minutes, Scott arrives at his new school, makes friends, starts a band, meets Kim, fights off bullies for her, the two of them date, and then Scott moves off to Toronto, all to hip band Wavves' song "Post Acid." Wavves don't sound too different from Sex Bob-omb, whose songs populate many of the official and fan-made trailers. As each soundtrack barrels the viewer through snippets of romance, jokes, and fighting, both the animation and the fan trailers are supposed to inform the audience on who or what Scott Pilgrim is, and why they should go see the movie about him. "Animated film cannibalizes and refashions everything it touches with a ferocity that is itself mediated and excused," say Bolter and Grusin, partly because animation is not serious, and usually aimed at children (Bolter 147). But *Scott Pilgrim vs The Animation* was made for Adult Swim, and like comics,

animation is starting to be more widely accepted as an adult medium, so why is it excused? Arguably, fans don't mind being subjected to another advertisement for the film because their favourite franchise has been remediated and reborn as an animation.

The Blueprint² : The Gift & The Curse

One of my favourite fan remediations which work to blend comics and film are the slideshow adaptation of the comics, complete with voice actors, soundtracks, and panels straight from the comics. Some, like *Scott Pilgrim, Whats My Age Again?*, pick popular songs to play over a montage of pages from the comics. This repurposing of Blink-182's hit song "What's My Age Again?" is meant to draw focus to the raucous process of Scott Pilgrim's coming of age story. Some, like MAUWORLD274's *Scott Pilgrim's Sushi Dinner* and *the wonderful world of Kim Pine by Bryan Lee O'Malley (2007)* provide viewers a mediated reading of out of print and hard to find short stories. Although these comics are now available at scottpilgrim.com, it's strange that slideshows of the panels accompanied by very loud Fall Out Boy songs was the best way for the fan to share these non-essential stories. SrslyFunny made a fan trailer for *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour* out of art from the previous books, and Wacka14 has made a number of promo videos for a dramatic reading of *Scott Pilgrim* with actors playing the characters word for word, panel for panel. These fans seem to be craving adaptations of the book on screen, and will put it together as jarringly as possible.

Maybe most interestingly of these are *scott pilgrim animation done with the comics*, *Slick(Patel's Song) Scott Pilgrim comic book version*, and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World Trailer – Graphic Novel Recreation*. Each of these takes audio from animation,

soundtrack, and movie trailer, and recreates the scenes with panels from the comic.

MrGameAndWatch's animation adaptation regresses the remediation of *Scott Pilgrim vs The Animation*, a piece that was already word-for-word from the comics, to the level of storyboard with audio accompaniment. SimonRivasV2's reframing of Patel's flashback and fight with Scott negates the film adaptation's version of the scene. In the movie, Patel's flashback is told through motion comics, and ends with defeating Patel on his own. By taking the audio and laying it back overtop of the comics, SimonRivasV2 is denouncing the motion comics, which many comic purists find annoying, and reinstating that Scott and his friends fight Patel in a choreographed dance sequence lifted from Tetsuya Mizuguchi's video game, *Space Channel 5*. Finally, almost in an example of fans applying checks and balances to adaptations, theMrblonde2010's recreation of the movie's trailer attempts to deduce how faithful the film will be to its source material. theMrblonde2010 is almost apologetic in his description, explaining that even though some things in the trailer are line-for-line, shot-for-shot from the comic, the movie will contain things that are different. In her book on adaptation, Linda Hutcheon says that such a process is repetition, but "it is repetition without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight and surprise of novelty. *As adaptation*, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation," (Hutcheon 173). These remixers aren't bringing anything new to the *Scott Pilgrim* fan universe, but instead are checking how they remember the story against what studios are putting forward. Memory is a fragmented process, and it makes sense that such attempts to put it back together or to legitimize it with official, textual comparisons uses montage as the storytelling language.

Gently Folding

This piecework, which is reinforced by official remediation like *Scott Pilgrim vs The Animation*, encourage this type of juxtaposing, dissociative storytelling in fan works, leading to the plethora of fan trailer mash-ups. Recontextualizing video of *Doctor Who*, *The Matrix*, or *Harry Potter* means that fans are generating their own closure by placing *Scott Pilgrim* into a greater pop-culture fan community. Creators do not have control over juxtaposing stories and franchises together, as they do not know where these books or movies sit on the shelves or harddrives of the fans. For Manovich, this is because the illusion of immediacy is being replaced by the hypermediacy of interacting with a text:

“A cinema image becomes just a small window on a computer screen; one stream among many others coming to us through the network; one file among numerous others on our hard drives.”

(Manovich 189)

It’s harder now to be a fan of only one franchise without following up on references, tie-ins, or stories in a similar genre. It’s harder for *Firefly* to take up your entire life, when with the click of a button you have access to a community that also loves *Fringe*, *Cowboy Bebop*, and *Torchwood*. No franchise exists in a vacuum, no fan can either: to be knowledgeable of *Scott Pilgrim* is to be knowledgeable about *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Ranma ½*, and the Toronto Reference Library. Once fans understand the scope of a text, and once fans understand themselves in relation to a text, there is an excitement and pleasure in seeing that franchise adapted; For every reader who saw himself as the same nerdy everyman that Scott Pilgrim portrays, they are seeing a part of themselves being transferred between comic books, animations, movies, and more; “Whenever our identity is mediated in this way, it is also remediated, because we always understand a particular medium in relation to other past and present media,” (Bolter 232). So the pleasure in

seeing or making an adaptation or a remix of a text is the pleasure in being able to play with and redefine your identity.

MUSIC

Scott Pilgrim! Top of the Pops!

Jenkins, in his early exploration into music videos and fan cultures, noted that people who watch MTV did not expect linear narratives from music videos. Plots and stories became popular topics for music videos, and while it is a norm of the genre, narrative is not necessary – an absurd series of effects and juxtaposed images is just as acceptable for a music video as live concert footage or a well-produced vignette. Overall, “what gives this form its coherence is not the logic of the images, but the centrality of the performer whose presence and appearance is continually reinscribed,” (“Textual Poachers” Jenkins 233). The primary goal of music videos were to promote the artist and sell more albums, but even longtime fans of an artist still watched the videos for the exposure to their musical idols. While *Scott Pilgrim* and its accompanying fan videos largely share this non-linear, cut-up style of presentation, Jenkins’ draws a distinction between the types of videos and audiences that MTV garners, and what fan communities create. MTV invites viewers to take pleasure in letting the channel choose what they watch and listen to. “Fan videos,” on the other hand, “demand the active participation of the viewer as a precondition for making meaning of their quick yet logical progression of images,” (“Textual Poachers” Jenkins 237). While fan videos are often very different from one another both in method and content, the unity of a re-presentation of *Scott Pilgrim* is enough incentive for fans to watch, comment, and further remix. Like the official franchise, some references may be lost or ignored, but it’s the overall feeling and effect of being a part of the largely *Scott Pilgrim* universe that connects this community.

Nevermind the Buzzcocks

The only official *Scott Pilgrim* music video, available as an iTunes bonus when purchasing the film's soundtrack, featured the actors playing The Clash at Demonhead performing Metric's "Black Sheep." Beyond that, music videos on Youtube are either remixes of content from the film and comics set to Sex Bob-omb songs, mashups with other franchises, instructional fan videos on how to play songs from the soundtrack, or simply fan covers of songs only theorized in the books.

Mizuko Ito in *The rewards of non-commercial production: Distinctions and status in the anime music video scene* discusses the type of satisfaction that fans get from being a part of such communities:

Fan producers situate themselves within a community of peers who share their subcultural identities and interests, and their status and interaction among these peers is what drives engagement and the production of high quality work.

(Ito).

For some there is the validation of meeting other people who love and remix the same media. The power of being in a community of like-minded producers is inspiring and encouraging to keep refashioning the media that you all enjoy.

Although editors rely on a mixture of inspiration, creativity, and hard work to create their videos, most will also acknowledge the importance of social support within the creative community. What constitutes an original and creative work is something that can only be understood within the social back-and-forth of commentary about videos.

(Ito)

This, combined with Jenkins' active viewers of fan videos who decode references, help further the franchise with new iterations as well as by forging stronger links to other stories. *BECK vs Scott Pilgrim and The World: Threshold*, by Roidy17, plays on the name of real world Sex Bob-omb songwriter Beck and the popular anime *BECK*:

Mongolian Chop Squad. Conversations that go on in the comment thread either praise or critique such videos, and contribute to whether or not the remixer will make more. While a Beck to *BECK* reference is understandable by the community at large, where a history of AMV's and mashing up video from other franchises is fairly common, it's worth noting the number of fan music videos that do the opposite, i.e. remixing footage from *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* with songs that are incongruous to the genre of the franchise or film soundtrack. From crooners like Paul Anka's "Puppy Love" to alt-rock mopes Eve 6, fans are ignoring the predetermined, franchise-approved soundtrack in favour of songs that are meaningful or humorous to them. This is a strong example of fans recontextualizing *Scott Pilgrim* in order to understand how it fits in relation to their other interests.

OST

Music critic Matthew Perpetua, in a review for popular online tastemaker Pitchfork Media, says that the *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* soundtrack "is very thoughtful in its curation and stands as a very accurate interpretation of O'Malley's fictional world," (Perpetua). This popular interpretation then means that *Scott Pilgrim* embodies indie rock that hovers slightly above glam and garage bands. This makes sense why Beck, Broken Social Scene, and Metric were asked to contribute songs to the soundtracks as pretend bands Sex Bob-Omb, Crash and the Boys, and Clash at Demonhead, respectively. Perpetua says that Beck's songs capture the idea that Sex Bob-Omb are "not especially good, but could believably get by on charm and a well-circulated mp3," and while their songs may be great for a fictional garage band, "they're mediocre at best by Beck

standards,” (ibid). The frantic under-a-minute songs of Broken Social Scene as Crash and the Boys approach the sound assault that O’Malley hints at in the books, but they don’t literally floor the audience with their music. And finally, the Clash at Demonhead read as Metric stand-ins since they first appeared in the books, so “Black Sheep” is only a natural allegory for sound and screen.

While Wright’s film is caching in somewhat on the pedigree of artists that they’ve brought into the fold, as big indie names will get traction on music blogs, it’s interesting to see how Perpetua treats these songs as actors, whether or not they played their roles effectively on record. Most garage rock bands would write mediocre Beck songs, but such authenticity is suppressed by the fact that Beck should be able to do better. The non-original songs, which include tracks by glam icon T-Rex and dance rock band Blood Red Shoes, are deemed by Perpetua to “carry the general vibe of the movie and make for decent mix CD fodder, but aren’t particularly essential,” (ibid.). While this might be a shortcoming for an official franchise soundtrack, and probably partly why the album was only rated 6.7/10, it’s an integral part of fan participation in music-based communities.

cSP

Baym identifies that music fans “share the very objects of their fandom by making mix tapes, playlists, writing mp3 blogs, and sending one another recordings and bootlegs,” (“Music Fandom” Baym). Instead of having to know how to play instruments to write cover songs or write fan folk music (also known as filk music) music fans are able to play around with recontextualizing, reframing, and remediating their favourite music in communal practice both on and offline.

In 2009, then semi-popular comic book news blog *Living Between Wednesdays* hosted a contest where entrants had to share their ultimate *Scott Pilgrim* playlist. While the winner was selected at random, the goal of the playlist was to embody that scrappy attitude that Beck would recreate over a year later. Some of the entrants posted songs and explanations for why that song was appropriate, whether it captured a particular emotion or fit a certain character specifically. Other posted songs without comment, allowing either the songs to stand on their own or allow the juxtaposition of them with other songs in a mix to suffice for whatever meaning the listeners imbued. As the contest moderator put it to everyone creating playlists, “Man, you guys are all so hip!” (Goguen). Sure, most music fans are thrilled at the chance to make mix tapes, but this is a franchise precedent set by O’Malley and Wright. In the backs of *Scott Pilgrim & the Infinite Sadness* and *Scott Pilgrim vs The Universe* O’Malley listed playlists that were supposed to embody the mood of the books, and in the back of *Scott Pilgrim’s Finest Hour* he lists the albums that he listened to while making the book. Wright in many interviews has explained how in the process of trying to decide what Sex Bob-omb or Crash & The Boys sounded like, he and O’Malley would trade mixtapes or Myspace links, trying to nail down a common ground as to what readers hear in their heads when reading the books. Indie band Times New Viking were in the running to stand-in for Sex Bob-Omb, but in the end their sound was considered too raw for Hollywood. This process does not just remediate the songs of the artists, reconfiguring and recontextualizing them for mix tapes or soundtracks, but it also remediates what O’Malley and Wright both represented as lightning bolts shooting off of a guitar.

Accompanied by ____ on songs.

In the essay *Popular Songs and Comic Allusion*, Jeff Smith identifies that the pleasure in seeing songs in films, or more generally the act of soundtracking with existing material, comes from juxtaposing literal and figurative meanings of songs with the actions in question. A fan video using “Way Away” by the band Yellowcard is identifying the lyrics of heartache and struggle to draw comparisons between Ramona and Gideon or Scott and Knives’ relationships. “Combat Baby” in a video by OliviaNiamhCullen not only capitalizes on the fact that Metric wrote the song, but that the lyrics can directly reference the kickass nature of Sex Bob-omb drummer Kim Pine. These songs are bridges between the emotions and associations of the fan, to what O’Malley and Wright created for audiences. There may be an explicit connection between lyrics and plot devices or characters, but the mashups also serve to reframe and reinforce conversation via reference, or communicating with mediated totems for feelings. On the other hand, speed metal songs like Pissed Off People’s “METALMORPHSICKNESS” being set to clips of the movie just come across more as a joke than a true attempt to remediate the film through the song.

Frank Black’s “I Heard Ramona Sing,” or Broken Social Scene’s “Anthem for a Seventeen Year Old Girl” have literal meaning in the film, with these soundtrack choices directly referencing Ramona and Knives, while Black Lips’ “O! Katrina,” or Brian LeBarton’s 8-bit cover of “Threshold” are there for their ability to convey swagger and nostalgia. A soundtrack standard that appears in multiple mix tapes and fan videos is the song “Scott Pilgrim” by 90s indie band Plumtree. O’Malley openly swiped the name for his titular character from this song, which has brought renewed interest to the Nova

Scotia band. The impact of O'Malley's appropriation reached maybe the deepest level of remediation in this franchise when cdiazpino posted a 16-bit cover version of "Scott Pilgrim" on Youtube, playing over top of a theoretical start menu for a then still hypothetical retro video game. Had Plumtree been left on their own they may have been forgotten like many other Canadian 90s indie bands, but their being repurposed and remediated has attracted them a new context for a whole new fanbase.

If there has to be a downside to this, it's that Plumtree no longer really have their own identity (Aside from the fact that the group have since broken up, with some member forming the new band Sister, who were one of the featured acts at the July block party.). Michael Cera wore a Plumtree shirt in the film, which was later made available to be purchased by fans. Plumtree did make some money off of selling shirts with their logo scrawled across the front, however those t-shirts are not Plumtree t-shirts to the fans – they are *Scott Pilgrim* shirts. By engaging in the interplay between reality and fantasy, Plumtree have lost some of their recognition and history in favour of their role in blurring the lines between their history and the fiction.

Stage Names & Stand Ins

Appropriation is, of course, not something new for music subcultures. Artists are constantly sampling and coopting from other cultures, taking everything from the blues to safety pins and turning them into something new. Sean Ebare touches on this in his essay *Digital music subculture: Sharing files, sharing styles*: "In their way, musical subcultures are continually recombining old symbols in new combinations," and, "youth identity is seen to shift in concert with these genre transformations," (Ebare). The communities both

on and offline that are generated around these cultures are places where fans can congregate and negotiate what it means to identify as a fan of such materials:

Genres and subcultures are negotiated by participants through talk, actions, clothing, and other behaviours. By taking part in the negotiation of culture, youth who are engaged with a genre are really refining their self concept or identity as they mature, and learn more about their situation in the world. As such, genre can be hotly contested, is taken quite personally and seriously, and is often most visible when expressed in "opposition" to something else — parents, authority figures, or other subcultures, predominantly. Over time, new influences lead to experimentation in the cross-pollination of genres, resulting in hybrids.

(Ebare)

The most salient idea presented there is that fans are generating identities based on hybrids, on remixes, and on remediations. Franchise and fan culture is no longer so solid as to be purely a Trekkie or Browncoat, and so it's harder to identify solely in relation to that one thing. A fan now has to contend with competing and similar interests in negotiating their fan identities.

Susan O'Neill, in the essay *The self-identity of young musicians*, says that one of the biggest struggles for those who identify as musicians is the desire to perfect their craft. It's easy to set up a Myspace page and call yourselves a band, but it's much harder to learn an instrument and get good at it. O'Neill notes that a number of the students felt as if they were "battling" the music, trying to beat it in order to get better at their instrument (O'Neill 90). This is not so different from Lessig and Bruns' ideas around the remix and produsage communities' perfecting of drafts and artefacts. Even though a young musician may know a few chords, or a remixer may have learned some editing skills, they are constantly pushing forward against their craft to be better at it.

"Battle" is a key word for musical identities in *Scott Pilgrim*, considering how Scott and Todd Ingram fight, briefly, via Bass Battle (another potential reference, to the

dueling banjos in *The Curse of Monkey Island*). In the books Todd beats Scott using a combination of amazing bass guitar solos and psychic powers, represented by depictions of energy bolts and reverb-powered G's. The films are similar, where Scott's taunting bass lines are emphasized by a pulsating stream of 'D-D-D-D...' Scott's guitar playing, as it does in the Amp vs Amp battle against the Katayanagi twins later on, generates massive winds, with Todd winning as his powers and playing throw Scott around the room with concussive sonic waves. Visual effects supervisor Frazer Churchill explained to MTV Canada that the sonic waves were based off of the old RKO pictures logo, but fans are also drawing connections to former X-men member Havok's ionic energy rings (Ditzian). The battle's audio is available on the soundtrack – noting the remixes of it showing up online – along with a different version invented for the video game. Fans post their covers of the Bass Battle bass lines online, or have their own mock-battles against friends. One of the more interesting remediations of this sequence is seen in *LEGO Scott Pilgrim vs the world – Bass Battle*, where LEGO version of Todd and Scott face each other to the song “Bass Battle,” until the Scott LEGOman is pulled away at Todd's defeating final strum. This stand-off demonstrates the complex web that just one moment of remediation and remixing has in the produsage community. There are so many ways and opportunities for fans to debate and negotiate meanings of the franchise all while starting to develop their own identities. To understand *Scott Pilgrim*, and to understand an identity in relation to *Scott Pilgrim*, fans explore these different avenues until they find or create the one that they feel represents them.



Figure 3

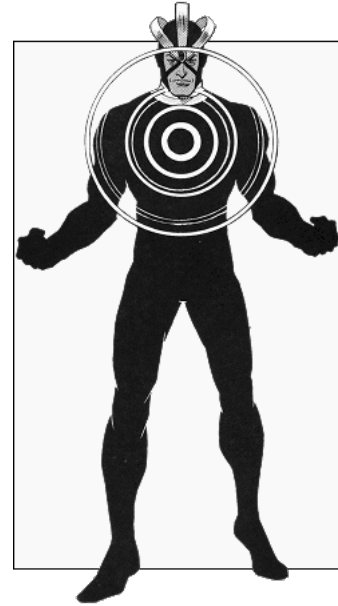


Figure 4



Figure 5

Teach me how to...

Of all the implicit invites in the franchise for fans to produce new works, it's interesting to see that the explicit interactive moments in the text are left out of remediation by the official franchise adaptations, instead being reconfigured by the fans. A performance of the Sex Bob-Omb song "Launchpad McQuack" is accompanied in

Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life with lyrics and a tab in order to learn how to play the songs (See Figure 3). The same thing happens in Vol. 2, also titled *Scott Pilgrim vs The World*, when in recounting a song Scott wrote for his former employer “Untitled Composition by Scott Pilgrim,” the words are structured with chords and the notation that it’s a sad country waltz (See Figure 4). Users like EniesVLobby and bdm56 have posted their versions of the songs on Youtube. Wright claimed that O’Malley was happy to never think about what the bands actually sounded like, repurposing tabs and chord charts suggests more that O’Malley wanted to hear these songs but didn’t have time to get them all written (KCRW). And by opening the door to play one of the songs, all songs become fair game. bdm56 took it upon himself to imagine what the song “Ramona” would sound like: In the books Scott repeatedly sings Ramona’s name to her, explaining that it’s a song he wrote, but there are no accompanying directions for notes or pacing. A month before Beck’s version appeared in the film, bdm56, by request from the community, invented chords and rhythm for the song. newengland vampire even attempted a faithful cover of Crash and the Boys 0.4 seconds long “I’m am sad, so very very sad.” Now, the Broken Social Scene version of that song – which clocks in at just under 4 seconds – could never have been 0.4 seconds, as a BSS product needs to be recognized and easily consumed by the general public and most people don’t know where to begin in comprehending a song that’s under a second. This shows that the fan community is a space where the quirky authenticity of the books can still be remediated.



Figure 6



Figure 7

The Life Pursuit

Bolter and Grusin warn against the remediative qualities in music:

Rock music expects, if it does not require, that the viewer/listener be intimately involved in the hypermediacy - that she 'abandon herself' to the music. This abandonment is all the more threatening because there is nothing offered beyond the medium - no world into which the user can enter - as there is in conventional representational media, such as linear perspective painting.

(Bolter 71)

Bolter and Grusin are saying that participating in music either as a musician or a listener tends to be very limited to the constructed nature of the medium: you are either producing or hearing sound, but in the end it is just about the sound. This is a troubling statement, least of which because it means that Bolter and Grusin are ignoring listener accounts that a song takes them on a journey, or the storytelling construction behind Rock Operas, or some music videos. Importantly for a discussion about *Scott Pilgrim*, Bolter and Grusin are ignoring an entire network of references, remixes, and adaptations. An artist like Girl Talk who thrives in hypermediacy still offers listeners connections to the artists he samples, the online community which dissects and discusses his work, documentaries which use him as a figurehead for copyright reform, and more. *Scott Pilgrim* and all of its remediations offer fans an entirely similar experience. Fan communities show that there is more than just the hypermediacy of the work, that there is a depth beyond the joy of remediation and new technological interpretations, and that there is more to a work than the version presented in official iterations.

Linda Hutcheon, in talking about people who recreate texts says:

All these adapters relate stories in their different ways. They use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they

make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But these stories they relate are taken from elsewhere, not invented anew.

(Hutcheon 3)

The essentials of a story, the characters, genre, or basic plot may not be invented anew in an adaptation, but remediation does more than just reframe and show respect to the original. Different media and genres have specific storytelling conventions which change pacing or representations of story aspects. In comedy timing is everything, so a shift in mediated pacing might change the impact of a joke. Music that can floor an audience in *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life* becomes wrestling dragons and ogres in the movie version to convey the same power and effect.

Discussion

Adaptation is popular in Hollywood, partly because fans represent a built-in customer base. This base proves that the story works, that something about its characters or idiosyncrasies resonates with audiences somewhere, somehow. So not only are there some guaranteed sales for the studio, but they need to invest less money to in generating compelling worlds to film. Fans will promote the movie with speculation and online discussion, and will buy tickets on opening night. There are numerous examples of franchise adaptations that banked on online hype as an indicator of positive interest only to find themselves with fans angered by mistakes in the film, or, worse, with no fans showing up to theaters. The latter case did happen with *Scott Pilgrim vs The World*, but even if it underperformed financially, it's worth paying attention to the almost universal fan appraisal of the adaptation. While hardcore purists will denounce the movie version for its inaccuracies, most fans are willing to accept discontinuity for the sake of seeing new depictions of their favourite characters and stories. Fans had been made well aware that the two films would end essentially the same but with different methods of getting there, as O'Malley hadn't written all of the books by the time the movie's script went into development. Part of this acceptance in deviation could come from how convincingly Wright attempted to recreate the feel of reading comics or playing old video games, or that the cast did an excellent job in accurately portraying their characters. However, I think that this paper shows how fans create a constant dialogue online, building a consensus on what the film means or how best to portray it. This is a community which is constantly feeding off of each other and the franchise proper in order to better understand it and themselves. Wright and O'Malley, as well as a number of the musicians and

remixers associated with the franchise, are constantly online and interacting with their fans via twitter or their personal websites. They are aware that people want to know more, and that fans have more to share. Wright frequently shares fan mashups and remixes, and O'Malley posts process artwork and photos of cosplayers that he meets at conventions. These types of interactions are moments where the creators and the recreators can talk about what the franchise means, and how best to recreate it once again.

The elephant in the room in this discussion is, as always, with so much energy being devoted by producers into recreating and revamping their favourite creations, how do we begin to value it against pure originality. The debate of theft and appropriation aside, remixing and remediating inherently relies on outside work to be injected into the community. Without it, there is nothing for the producers to produce. In the case of *Scott Pilgrim*, and arguably most modern media, the ability to create a work that stands alone, free of references or homage, is nearly impossible. *Scott Pilgrim* is more original in how it builds off of its references than fan creations, it is valued as a stand-alone work, but it is also clearly indebted to prior creations. Nothing is created in a vacuum, and perhaps the transparency of adaptation and creativity being displayed and encourage by studios and publishers dismissed the illusion of an independent artistic creation. Universal Studios is not afraid of people recognizing genre, humouristic, or intertextual references in *Scott Pilgrim*. This, like many franchises, revel in their explicit and implicit creative histories. Breaking down this barrier to creation and play implies that this franchise is unique and fun, but also comes from somewhere else: tell me a story that stands on its own, and I'll point you to the prequel.

Conclusion

Even though the books and films are made and done, *Scott Pilgrim* will not be quiet. The books are continuously being translated, a toyline launched this year, and the visual language of the franchise is being referenced in music videos by musicians like Swound!, The Vines, T-Pain and Chris Brown, while continually being tweaked and perfected by fans in videos like *The Real Scott Pilgrim* or *Scott Pilgrim VS 60 Seconds*. *Scott Pilgrim* didn't quite hit the mainstream the way Universal Studios may have hoped, but the franchise didn't lose any audience by ignoring or barring the contributions of fans from affecting the production. *Scott Pilgrim* is democratic, communal, and never the same twice. As a modern, transmedia franchise, *Scott Pilgrim* is exciting because of the sum of all its parts, not just the ones audiences would typically pay to see. Meaning, presentation, mediation, and fidelity are all open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Essentially, *Free Scott Pilgrim*.

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Mixtapes and Downloads

1. Free Scott Pilgrim: Audio adaptation of *Free Scott Pilgrim* comic book.
2. Living Between Wednesdays: This mix won the “Scott Pilgrim Contest.”

Tracklist as follows.

1. Attack in Black – Young Leaves
2. Be Your Own Pet – Super Soaked
3. Born Ruffians – Little Garçon, Little Fille
4. The D’urbervilles – Hot Tips
5. Chad VanGalen – Burn 2 Ash
6. The Diablos – Sugar Laced Soul
7. The Flaming Lips – She Don’t Use Jelly
8. Jay Reatard – I Know a Place
9. Keren Ann – Lay Your Head Down
10. Magneta Lane – Secrets Aren’t So Bad
11. The Meligrove Band – I’m Easy
12. Ninja High School – Shake It Off
13. The Stolen Minks – Bring It
14. The White Stripes – I want to be the boy to warm your Mother’s heart

3. Oh, Sorry: A mixtape full of songs which soundtracked the writing of this paper.

Tracklist as follows.

1. The Lovely Feathers – In The Valley
2. Times New Viking – More Rumours
3. PS I Love You – Facelove
4. Talking Heads – Thank You For Sending Me An Angel
5. Clap Your Hands Say Yeah – Upon This Tidal Wave of Young Blood
6. Thee Oh Sees – If I Stay Too Long
7. The Sandwiches – Summer of Love
8. Harlem – Cloud Pleaser
9. Kurt Vile – Baby’s Arms
10. The Magnetic Fields – The Book of Love
11. Paul McCartney – Ram On
12. Silly Kissers – Halloween Summer
13. Memoryhouse – Lately (Deuxieme)
14. Casiotone for the Painfully Alone – I Love Creedence
15. The Doors – Riders on the Storm

Download Link: <http://www.mediafire.com/?3ppc3qoqm2dm2hy>